

SLIPPERY STONE

an inquiry into Islam's stance on music

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to Muslim youth

Beware the Pied Piper

TRANSLITERATION KEY

ء (إِءْء)	' (a slight catch in the breath)	غ	gh (similar to French r)
ا	a	ف	f
ب	b	ق	q (heavy k, from the throat)
ت and ة	t (ة has an "h" sound at the end of a sentence)	ك	k
ث	th (as in "thorn")	ل	l
ج	j	م	m
ح	ḥ (heavy h, from deep within the throat)	ن	n
خ	kh ("ch" in Scottish loch)	ه	h (as in "help")
د	d (the hard "th" in "the")	و	w
ذ	dh (the soft "th" in "the")	ي	y (as in "yellow")
ر	r		Vowels
ز	z	ـَ / ـُ	a (slightly softer than the "u" in "but"); an
س	s	ـِ	i (as in "in"); in
ش	sh	ـِ / ـُ	
ص	ṣ (heavy s, from the upper mouth)	و و	u ("oo" in "book"); un
ض	ḍ (heavy d, from the upper mouth)	آ ا'	ā (elongated a, as when you would stretch the "a" in "plastic")
ط	ṭ (heavy t, from the upper mouth)	أ	ā at the start of a word, 'ā in the middle (pronounced like إءْء)
ظ	ẓ (heavy z, from the upper mouth)	و and ء	ū ("u" in "glue")
ع	ʿ (like two a's from deep within the throat)	ي and ي	ī ("ee" in "fect")
		ّ	stress symbol, indicated by repetition of letter

Honorifics

ﷻ	Glorified and Most High	ﷻ	May Allah's blessings and peace be upon him
ﷺ	May peace be upon him	ﷺ, ﷺ	May Allah be pleased with him/her

هو الصفا الزلال لا يثبت عليه إلا أقدم العلماء

It (*samā'*) is a slippery stone; only the feet of the '*ulamā*' can stay firm on it.

— Quoted in *'Awārif al-Ma'ārif* by Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī

Contents



Foreword	XIII
Preface	XVII

Introduction • 1

Part One: Historic Perspective

1 *Islām and Poetry • 15*

Power of the Poet	15
Islām on Poetry	19
Early Muslims and Poetry	24
Islām's Influence on Arabic Poetry	26

2 *Music Before and After Islām • 37*

Ḥudā' and Rajaz	37
The Many Uses of Music	39
The Age of Kings	45
The Music Debate in History	52
Musician in the Muslim Society	54

3 *Music and the Media Revolution* • 57

Gramophone: The Making of Gauhar Jān	58
Radio: The Reign of Umm Kulthūm	61
Film: The Melody Queen of the Islāmic Republic	67
Television	69
Perspective on Technology	71
Mass Culture for the Mass Market	74
"Winning the Hearts and Minds"	75

4 *The Orientalists* • 79

Farmer's History of Arabian Music	81
Shiloah's "Great Musical Tradition"	92
Islām versus Christianity on Music	96

Part Two: Clearing the Fog

5 *Islāmic Source Texts: The Qur'ān* • 105

Verses Indicating Prohibition	107
Verses Indicating Permission	122

6 *Islāmic Source Texts: The Ḥadīth* • 133

Aḥādīth Indicating Prohibition	134
Aḥādīth Indicating Permission	153
The Issue of Weak Aḥādīth	163

7 *The Views of Early Muslims* • 1678 *Samā': The Sufi Perspective* • 175

Imām Ghazālī (d. 505/1111)	187
Aḥmad al-Ghazālī (d. 520/1126)	194
ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulī (d. 1141/1729)	197

9 *The Case for Malāhī* • 205

Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064)	205
Ibn Ṭāhir al-Maqdisī (d. 507/1113)	210
The Fatwa of al-Azhar	217

10 *The Rulings of the Jurists* • 227

Ḥanafī School	228
Mālikī School	232
Shāfi'ī School	234
Ḥanbalī School	242
Salafī Position	245
Shī'ah Position	246
Conclusion	251

Part Three: Where Now?

11 *Music in Muslim Society Today* • 255

The Sound Arts Hierarchy of Lois al-Faruqi	256
Saving the Youth	260
The Nashīd Artists	262
Music and the Qur'ānic Recitation	267

12 *Beyond the Debate* • 273

APPENDIX 1: Rulings on Nashīds	281
APPENDIX 2: The Music Debate in History	285
APPENDIX 3: Biographical Notes	301
APPENDIX 4: Glossary	331



Bibliography	337
Index	349

CHAPTER 1

ISLĀM AND POETRY

GHINĀ' MEANS SINGING, AND TO SING YOU NEED something that can be sung. Quite naturally, poetry precedes singing. In case this simple point is not obvious to someone—like the devoted followers of Sigmund Freud—we may refer to sociologist Georg Simmel who says: "The source of vocal music is the spoken word, which is exaggerated by emotion in the direction of rhythm and modulation."¹ He argues that vocal music arises when plain language is felt inadequate to express powerful emotions like anger, joy, or mystical religious feelings.

Thus, we begin our inquiry into singing with an inquiry into poetry.

Power of the Poet

It is generally known that poetry was the highest achievement and the pride of Arab society. Poets enjoyed roughly the same kind of power that is displayed today by the mass media. And nearly the same concern for truth and justice. An Arabic saying captured it

1. Georg Simmel (1882), "Psychological and Ethnological Studies on Music," in *Georg Simmel: The Conflict in Modern Culture and Other Essays*, trans. by K. Etzkorn (Columbia University Press: New York, 1968), 100. Quoted in Etzkorn, *Music and Society*, 12.